



Mayor's Office, City of Penticton

171 Main Street, Penticton, B.C. V2A 5A9

Tel: 250-490-2400 Fax: 250-490-2402

www.penticton.ca

Ministry of Transportation and Transit
Honorable Mike Farnworth

VIA EMAIL: TT.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Farnworth,

January 29, 2025

On behalf of the City of Penticton I am writing to underscore the urgent need for provincial action on the maintenance and accessibility of the 201 and to highlight the increasingly severe impact of closures and delays on highway 97 between Penticton and Kelowna.

Monday, the unexpected closure of the William R Bennet Bridge due to an emergency effectively severed the primary route between Penticton and Kelowna. With the 201 remaining in unsuitable condition for travel, travelers and residents were left with no realistic or viable alternate. Many were forced to take Highway 33 adding upwards of 3 hours to their journey, while others were forced to cancel long awaited medical appointments, endure costly delays or navigate uncertainty in an already strained regional transportation network.

Highway 97 is the **only** North-South highway connecting communities between West Kelowna and Penticton. The province itself has recognized Highway 97 as follows: "Highway 97 is the "spine" of the transportation network in the Central Okanagan and currently performs many functions: supporting goods movement in, out and through the area, carrying local, inter-regional and inter-provincial traffic of all kinds, including transit, providing local access to residential, employment, educational, and commercial centres, delivering virtually unlimited access to the local and regional road networks, and offering the only practical route between communities on opposite sides of Okanagan Lake. Many of these functions are incompatible with one another, leading to operational conflicts, overload and congestion."

Yet, Highway 97 has been blocked off multiple times in the past 10 years by mudslides, fires, traffic accidents and major rockslides.

Meanwhile the provincial centralization of critical services in Kelowna – including medical care (Kelowna General Hospital, Kelowna Cancer Clinic), transportation (Kelowna International Airport, access to the Coquihalla), and post-secondary education (UBC Okanagan) – has only deepened the regions reliance on this single, fragile route.

The lack of an alternative route is no longer just an inconvenience – it is a fundamental failure of transportation planning that puts thousands of residents, businesses and emergency services at risk.

Highway 97 closures and delays are no longer isolated incidents—they are a recurring reality. Without urgent provincial action to improve resilience in our transportation network, the economic, social, and safety impacts will only continue to grow.

The City of Penticton has repeatedly raised the issue of the 201 with the Southern Interior Local Government Association and with the Ministry at the Union of British Columbia meetings in 2024 and has received widespread support. This route should be a viable emergency alternative but remains impassable due to inadequate maintenance and the absence of proper accessibility standards. This cannot continue.

We need a concrete provincial commitment to upgrade and maintain the 201 to a standard that ensures safe, year-round travel.

We look forward to your response and to working with your Ministry on this pressing issue.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JB' followed by a stylized flourish.

Julius Bloomfield
Mayor

CC. Ministry of Forests
Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Regional District Okanagan Similkameen
City of Kelowna
City of Vernon
City of West Kelowna